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from her old friend
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ON SHAKESPEARE, "O! WHAT YOU WILL."

COMEDY DELIVERED BEFORE THE HARVARD CHAPTER OF
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BY

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ON SHAKESPEARE,¹

"OR, WHAT YOU WILL."

WILL you permit me to say a few words of a nature purely personal? I know it is not in good taste, but, nevertheless, I beg your indulgence. It is supposed that I now appear before you to deliver an Oration. Do you realize what a paralyzing word "Oration" is? Think how brilliant orations stud, like jewels, not only the pathway of the Phi Beta Kappa, but also that of civilization, far back into Greece and Rome. And to deliver an oration, there must be an orator. I am no orator, but merely a humble student; and am I to be dragged from my dusty corners and beloved cobwebs, to deliver an oration? I cannot bring my tongue to such a pace. No "Oration" will you hear from me to-day. If you will permit, I will only speak right on and tell you that which you yourselves do know, and consider you simply as a gathering of friends, met charitably to listen to the maunderings of an old man, who has been enticed hither by the venerable apothegm that "Philosophy is the guide of life." Ay, it may be so, but it does not guide us at all seasons. When Friar Lawrence offers philosophy as a comfort, the despairing Romeo cries: "Hang up philosophy! It helps not, it prevails not."

Permit me, therefore, to hang up Philosophy, and be this hour dedicate, in a humble way, to the works and words of him who bears the "greatest name in our literature,—the greatest name in all literature."

¹ Oration delivered in Sanders Theatre, June 25, 1908, before the Harvard Chapter of Phi Beta Kappa.

I'll not vex your ears with any eulogy of my own in praise of Shakespeare, — nor shall I attempt a subtle analysis of any of Shakespeare's characters. My highest guerdon will be, that hereafter, when recalling this occasion, you shall swear, a pleasanter hour ne'er was — *wasted* there.

Let me begin then with assuming the truth of Dryden's assertion that "of all poets, Shakespeare had the largest and most comprehensive soul." And, next, that his knowledge of human nature is infinite and supreme. His arrangement of scenes, his archaic words, his obscure expressions, his anachronisms, his ill-timed levity, his verbal conceits, all have been criticised at one time or another, and condemned; but his knowledge of human nature, with all its springs of action and of emotion, has never been questioned. Dr. Johnson goes so far as boldly to assert that Shakespeare "has not only shown human nature as it acts in real exigencies, but as it would be found to act in trials to which it cannot be exposed." Ridicule has been cast on this hyperbole, but did not the critics forget that the venerable and superstitious lexicographer had possibly in mind the Ghost of Hamlet's father? Few things could be to his nerves more sedative than an assurance that to such an apparition his own share of human nature could never be exposed. Even to such a monster as Caliban, Shakespeare imparted so much of human nature as to make him appear at least possible. By the way, did it ever occur to you to wonder why this misshapen, abhorred slave speaks in rhythm, a privilege which Shakespeare does not, in general, accord even to well-behaved servants or country-folk? There is no character in the play whose words fall at times into sweeter cadences. Why did Shakespeare thus endow him with lofty words? Does not Caliban himself indirectly tell us, when he says to Prospero:

"You taught me language . . . the red plague rid you
For teaching me your language."

Prospero's language was always of the highest and noblest. How then could the freckled whelp's language be otherwise? When Caliban says that his mistress showed him the man in the moon with his dog and his bush, does no picture float before us of soft summer nights on the Enchanted Isle, where, under the full orb'd moon, every hill and brook, and standing lake and grove, is peopled with elves, and, on the shore, overlooking the yellow sands,

where fairies foot it featly, sits the lovely, young instructress, with her pupil, Caliban, at her feet? No need to ask whence Caliban drew the poesy which filled his dreams with voices so sweet that when he waked he cried to dream again.

But to return. Perhaps as striking a way as any other of illustrating concisely Shakespeare's knowledge of human nature, and at the same time of showing the faultless consistency of his characters to their own individual nature, is to compare his varied treatment of the same theme. Take, for example, an instigation to murder, as disclosed in *Hamlet*, in *Richard the Third*, in *Macbeth*, and in *King John*. If time permitted, it would be delightful to read these several passages to you. I can merely beg you to read them for yourselves and mark how absolutely true is each character to itself.

The mention of *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* reminds me that there is an interpretation of a passage in each of these plays which I would fain submit to your judgement.

There are two lines in *Macbeth*, to which I have never heard but one general interpretation, and this interpretation has always been to me not only most inartistic, but even revolting in the extreme. It is in the second Scene of the second Act, where Lady Macbeth enters with the words :

"That which hath made them drunk, hath made me bold;
What hath quenched them, hath given me fire."

A hundred and thirty years ago Mrs. Griffith remarked that Shakespeare "seems to think that a woman could not be rendered completely wicked without some degree of intoxication." Subsequent commentators have in general acquiesced in the effect of wine indicated by Mrs. Griffith, or avoided reference to the passage; this interpretation remains therefore the only one, as far as I know, and is not only so gross, but implies such a violation of all art in representing a heroine as intoxicated, that I will not listen to it. Rather any solution, however far-fetched, or feeble, or childish, than that Lady Macbeth, in that supreme hour, was sustained by drink. But may we not find, in the attendant circumstances, another explanation of her words? Duncan was sleeping beneath the roof of his own kinsman, not only a kinsman, but the most loyal and trusted of Thanes. Could king be more *secure*? Verily, with the knowledge of this security, might not vigilance,

so far from being increased, be relaxed? Let the fumes of wine and wassail mount to the brain,—the King was absolutely safe; there could be none to harm him; by this conviction all fears were quenched and the sleep of every head in the castle might, for that night at least, be sound and deep. This then it was, as I think, this assurance of absolute security, this utter absence of suspicion, that beguiled the chamberlains into a relaxation of watchfulness and into sleep. And it was the knowledge of the existence of this assurance, and of the absence of this suspicion, that made Lady Macbeth bold. In the full conviction of an all-pervading sense of security, she could count on the success of the murder, and be fired with zeal to aid it. What had quenched all guards, had given her fire. I know it may be objected that she afterward says (*afterward*, pray observe) that she had drugged the grooms' possets. Had this fact caused her boldness, she would, I think, have mentioned it at first. But if it be still maintained that she refers to the drug, it must then be also admitted that she had herself partaken of it. Why then was not she drugged too? If the drug had quenched the grooms, why was not she too quenched? Drugs do not in general produce dissimilar effects—deadens the pulse in one person and quicken it in another. I do not forget that in planning the murder, Lady Macbeth had told her husband that she would convince the chamberlains with wine; but this refers to the possets, and does not countervail, I think, what I have just said, as to the interpretation of her first words.¹

As I have tried to save Lady Macbeth from the scandal of drunkenness, let me try to shield the poor, martyred Ophelia from the disgrace of telling a lie. This alleged lie is where she tells Hamlet that her father is at home, when her father is not at home. I must read the passage, and I think that in merely hearing it you will absolve the poor child of any intentional falsehood. Please bear in mind that Ophelia was still heartbroken over her last interview with Hamlet, and, in the fragment I am about to

¹ With what was said when this Address was delivered, Dr. W. J. Rolfe took exception, and courteously called me to task, in the *Boston Evening Transcript*, for neglecting to mention certain editors who had suggested interpretations of Lady Macbeth's words. But had I mentioned them all by name, with their notes, it would not have affected the point of my contention, which is that in the passage under discussion there is, in reality, no allusion whatsoever to wine as the cause of Lady Macbeth's boldness.

read, imagine her as disconsolate in the background, absorbed in her own sorrow. It is in the first Scene of the third Act. Rosen-
crantz and Guildenstern have been dismissed and the King says
to the Queen, "Good Gertrude, leave us too." Then he adds,
aside, for her private ear, his apology for asking her to leave:

"For we have closely sent for Hamlet hither,
That he, as 't were by accident, may here
Affront Ophelia.
Her father and myself, lawful espials,
Will so bestow ourselves that, seeing unseen,
We may of their encounter frankly judge,
And gather by him, as he is behaved,
If 't be the affliction of his love or no
That thus he suffers for."

Not a word of this *Aside* did Ophelia hear. The Queen replies,
"I shall obey you." Then, as she is leaving the room, she turns
to Ophelia and says tenderly,

"And for your part, Ophelia, I do wish
That your good beauty be the happy cause
Of Hamlet's wildness; so shall I hope, your virtue
Will bring him to his wonted way again,
To both your honours."

If Claudius's words had been spoken aloud, the Queen would
hardly have repeated Hamlet's name; Ophelia would have already
heard it, and the Queen would have spoken of *his* wildness, not of
Hamlet's wildness. The heartbroken Ophelia, hardly lifting her
eyes, says timidly: "Madam, I wish it may."

The Queen goes out, and Polonius bustles up, saying to his
daughter, "Ophelia, walk you here." Then, turning to the King
and courteously waving him to the door, with "Gracious, so please
you," adds, as an *Aside* for the King's ear alone, "We will
bestow ourselves." Then, as he approaches the door, he turns
back and addresses Ophelia with "Read in this book, That show
of such an exercise may colour your loneliness." Then he rambles
on, moralizing on "sugaring o'er the devil himself with devotion's
visage," etc., but no further word to Ophelia. They hear Hamlet
coming and at once withdraw. What intimation or faint hint,
even, has Ophelia received that the King and her father are to be
in concealment and overhear her interview with Hamlet? She had
been told merely to remain there with a book in her hand, and
await the Prince. When the Queen left the room, Ophelia had as

much cause to suspect *her* of eavesdropping, as she had of suspecting the King and her father when they left it. As a conclusive proof that Ophelia knew nothing of her father's concealment, and what is more, that her father knew she did not, his first words when he rejoins her, are "How now, Ophelia? You need not tell us what Lord Hamlet said [which proves that Ophelia, in the innocence of her heart, was beginning to report the interview as something unknown to her father]. We heard it all."

Is there any one who can lay his hand upon his honest heart and now assert his belief that, when, in answer to Hamlet's question, "Where's your father?" Ophelia said, "At home, my lord," the frightened child told a lie. If it be objected that I have no right arbitrarily to mark certain speeches as *Aside*, I can urge in reply that the text of the Folio gives us absolute freedom in the matter of *Asides*. Throughout that volume I know of only one passage that is so indicated, — it is in *Richard the Third*, I, iii, 319, where there is a stage-direction: "Speakes to himselfe," followed by the words: "For had I curst now, I had cursed myself." Other than this instance, I know of none, and I have examined every column in the Folio, and *think* that none has escaped me. In *Henry the Eighth*, in *1st Henry the Sixth*, in *Richard the Third*, and in *Anthony and Cleopatra*, there occur the stage-directions "Whispers," or "Whispers in his eare," but what is whispered is not given. The *Asides* in our modern text have been inserted by editors, chiefly by Rowe and by Pope, and shall I be debarred the privilege? Am I to allow the opprobrium of a falsehood to rest on a young girl's head, just for the lack of a beggarly *Aside*? Perish the thought!

The mention of Dr. Johnson reminds me of the *Preface* to his edition of Shakespeare, published in 1765. Never, since Dryden, has Shakespeare's pre-eminence been more vigorously proclaimed. To be sure, Pope has said of Shakespeare's "power over our passions," that the "heart swells and tears burst out just at the proper places," a very notable confession, considering the source. But listen to Dr. Johnson: "Shakespeare's drama is the mirror of life," and therein may be found "scenes from which a hermit may estimate the transactions of the world, and a confessor predict the progress of the passions. . . . Shakespeare has no heroes; his scenes are occupied only by men, who act and speak as the reader

thinks he himself would have spoken or acted on the same occasion. . . . Shakespeare approximates the remote and familiarises the wonderful ; the event which he represents will not happen, but if it were possible, its effects would probably be such as he has assigned it." Unfortunately, after all this exalted appreciation of Shakespeare, there follow pages of ignoble criticism of faults which we of to-day find venial enough. And it must be sorrowfully acknowledged that over the whole of this immortal *Preface* there is an air, faint, it is true, but still perceptibly present, of condescension ; Shakespeare was an actor, and in Dr. Johnson's day, actors were still classed with vagabonds ; there is the same condescension but brutally expressed, when Dr. Johnson said of Garrick, "Punch has no feelings." Let me say that here comes in our debt to Germany ; it is not our only debt, I mean in regard to Shakespeare, but our chiefest. The first voice that was raised in purely reverential tones from a seat at Shakespeare's feet was Lessing's. Then followed Coleridge, and the mists of condescension rolled away for ever.

There is in us all an eager and commendable curiosity to learn the incidents in the lives of notable personages, whereby we may be enabled to reanimate them and see them in their habits as they lived. In certain circumstances, may not this curiosity be pushed too far, and lead us to inquire too closely into everyday life ? Is that zeal commendable that prompts the publication of letters that were never meant to be shown abroad, much less printed, where the petty foibles of the daily round, and the trivial weaknesses, and worse, of domestic life, are laid bare to those who please to listen ? Is it fair ? Is it gentlemanly ? Does even length of time sanction such disclosures ? Who can read the *Paston Letters* without the conscious blushes of ingenuous shame at playing the ignominious part of an eavesdropper ? or at peeping through a keyhole ? (In a stage *Aside* let me answer that *I* can. But thou knowest in the state of innocency Adam fell ; and what should poor [I] do in the state of villainy ?) It has always been my terror lest the facts of Shakespeare's life should be derived from this keyhole scrutiny, and that the revelations might make us hang our heads. What mortal life, filled, as all our lives are, with low-thoughted care, can ever come up to our picture of the majestic bearing of the myriad-minded creator of these plays !

He speaks to us from a higher world, and far, far better is it to leave him there, a bright, aerial spirit, living insphered in regions mild of calm and serene air.

This, however, may not be. For two hundred years, since the days of Rowe, Shakespeare's earliest biographer, numberless keen eyes have been scrutinizing Church Registers, Town Records, Court Records, Pedigrees, Family Histories, Muniment Rooms, Archives, Genealogies, Household Accounts, and Correspondence, public and private, for any scrap or ort of the record of Shakespeare's life. Upon no throne has there beat a fiercer light, than on this peasant's son, William Shakespeare. And with what result? Very, very little beyond what Steevens set forth a hundred and twenty years ago: "All that is known," he said, "with any degree of certainty concerning Shakespeare, is that he was born at Stratford-on-Avon, — married and had children there, — went to London, where he commenced actor, and wrote poems and plays, — returned to Stratford, made his Will, died, and was buried." Beyond this, very little has been found, however, above the level of pounds, shillings and pence, except that he once stood as godfather to Henry Walker, and, possibly, one item discovered only within two years, namely, that in 1613, Shakespeare, with the help of his fellow-actor, Richard Burbadge, invented, for the sixth Earl of Rutland, an impresa, or heraldic crest, with a motto, and even upon this discovery doubts have been recently cast. Speculations as to the dates of his plays, however instructive, cannot be classed among the *known* facts of his life. All items, such as land bought, houses bought, debts sued for, tithes purchased, are all, except one, harmless enough, and are certainly valuable as showing Shakespeare's prudent thrift, and blameless life. As proofs of how far removed he was from the squalor, vice, and misery of so many of his contemporary dramatists, they are invaluable. And yet this elevation of personal character might have been measurably inferred without all this hard-won knowledge. The solitary fact that, apart from his quality as an actor, his name nowhere appears on public records, proves how noiseless was the tenor of his way. He never narrowly escaped from having his ears cropt like Ben Jonson; or from having his nose slit, like Marston; nor was he tortured on the rack, like poor Tom Kyd; nor did he indulge in tavern brawls, like Marlowe. Will you here permit me to make a digression? The men-

tion of Marlowe calls to mind the narrow escape which England made from enacting a tragedy blacker than its neglect of Chatterton, "That marvellous boy, The sleepless soul that perished in his pride." Marlowe's alleged atheism (in reality, but little removed from the Unitarianism of to-day) became bruited abroad, and an order for his apprehension was issued from the Star Chamber on the 19th of May, 1593. The next day Marlowe entered his appearance, and was commanded to be ready when called for. There can hardly be a question that had Marlowe's trial been only moderately pressed, he would have been condemned for heresy and have met the fate of Francis Kett, a Master of Arts from Marlowe's own College in Cambridge, only four years before, for not unsimilar heresy. But eleven days after Marlowe appeared before the Star Chamber, he was killed at Deptford in a tavern brawl. The dagger of an ignoble servant saved England from the indelible and ineffable disgrace of burning alive one of her greatest writers of tragedy.¹

I have said that all the facts thus far discovered about Shakespeare's life were harmless, "except one," and this belongs to the very class which I have all along dreaded, and feared might be detected. 'T is a long story and if I told it at all, it would be assuredly in the words of Shakespeare's latest biographer, Mr. Sidney Lee. You could not then see his blushes and, were I to tell the story circumstantially, you would see mine. In the fewest possible words it is, that two years before Shakespeare's death, the lord of the manor attempted to inclose certain common fields belonging to Stratford. This would have resulted in pecuniary damage to Shakespeare. The town of Stratford resolved upon a stout resistance and drew up a letter imploring Shakespeare to help them. But Shakespeare secured from the lord's steward a bond indemnifying him against all loss, and then, being safe himself, threw all his influence into the lord's scale. Happily the scheme failed and the common lands remained uninclosed.

Alas! alas! I magnanimously refrain from saying "I told you so." Can no Act of Parliament be passed forbidding, under pain of death, without benefit of clergy, all further research into Shake-

¹ This fact about Marlowe, as well as that Kyd, implicated in Marlowe's atheism, had been actually put to the torture, has been lately proved by Professor Boas, in his excellent edition of Kyd's *Works*.

Shakespeare's life? Can we not all fervently reëcho: "Good friend, for Jesus' sake forbear, To touch the dust enclosed here!" If the mundane facts of his life were tenfold as numerous as they are, what conception from them would be gained of the Creator of that splendid procession of characters that crosses his stage, more august, more brilliant, more varied than any single page of history can show? Or of him at whose creative word a whole new race of elves and fairies started into life and will live as Shakespeare's offspring as long as wild waves wash the yellow sands, or pearls hang in any cowslip's ear? It has been believed that we may discover what manner of man he was by searching through his works. Ah, no, — we may, peradventure, detect a few little personal traits, such as that he was very fond of the name Kate; that he thoroughly admired his own imaginary Brutus, whom he mentions, directly or indirectly, I believe, in every play he wrote; and we can on broad lines discern that he was always grandly on the side of Justice, Humanity, and Morality. For, look you, at the very hour when the torture-chamber of the Tower reëchoed the shrieks of victims, we hear the solemn warning, "You speak upon the rack, Where men enforced do speak anything." We can hardly appreciate the boldness, almost foolhardy, of such an utterance in the days of a Star Chamber. Or of the temerity of saying "It is an heretic that makes the fire, Not she which burns in it," when the embers at Smithfield were still glowing.

Out from the heart of nature rolled these profound utterances, and so much, on large proportions, may we know and recognize of the man, Shakespeare; but when we seek to find in his dramas his lesser, distinctive, purely personal traits, we cannot find him, he is not there, and it is because he is *not* there, that his plays are so heaven-high above the plays of other dramatists. Lear is Lear; Shylock is Shylock. They are not William Shakespeare behind a mask. Can we at any instant detect a gleam of Shakespeare's eye behind that mask, at that instant there is revealed a flaw. The character is not perfect, it is not true to itself. I must not speak in terms of exaggeration. There are unquestionably, here and there, such flaws as local, or temporary, or even personal allusions to be detected in his plays. But I do not deem it exaggeration to say that they are neither so numerous nor so pronounced that we can draw from them any conclusions as to Shakespeare's personal

character. His genius, his intellect, his sympathy are everywhere, in all and through all, from the first scene to the last. But he, the man, the son of John Shakespeare and Mary Arden, is nowhere. He went out of himself and into his characters, leaving behind age and sex and every adventitious accident of mind and heart. And so oblivious was he of the limitations of his stage that the knowledge that boys were destined to impersonate women never caused him to forget for an instant *das Ewig-Weibliche*, or diminish one dower in the plume that renders Juliet and Miranda, Perdita and Rosalind, Beatrice and Portia, so flawless, so feminine, and so true. Herein, let me add in parenthesis, lies a notable difference between Shakespeare and his contemporary dramatists; it is incomprehensible that Shakespeare's women were to be acted by boys; it is incomprehensible that the women of other contemporary dramatists were to be acted by anything else. Of course I speak broadly. To all general assertions there must be exceptions.

This, then, is one of Shakespeare's crowns (he has many more than the tiara of the Pope) that, in conceiving a character, he could utterly obliterate himself. Will you here allow me to suggest a heresy which will freeze your young blood? Can a dramatist, of imagination so compact that at will he becomes another person, different in every fibre of his nature from himself, have a decided character of his own? Can a strongly marked character, by any amount of imagination, be always obliterated? Can a man, stubbornly moulded, create Portia of Belmont, or Rosalind, or Juliet, or, most marvelous of all, Cleopatra? May it not be affirmed that the less decided a poet's own personal character is, and the greater his imagination, the more perfect is his capacity to become a dramatist? Buffon said, "the style is the man himself." But where there are fifty styles, where is the man himself?

And is our gentle Will thus to vanish into thin air, and be no more than such stuff as dreams are made on? Ah, no, let me not forget one most gracious heritage which Shakespeare bequeathed to us from the annals of his life. His prescient soul, that could forerun the ages, foresaw clearly enough the interest that, in the revolving years, his life and works would awaken, and so with a thoughtful kindness all his own, he kept himself concealed from public view for seven long years, — from 1585 to 1592 we know absolutely nothing about him (Halliwell thinks it was only during

five years, and that some money matters brought him to Stratford in 1587. Halliwell's Shakespeare may have slipped home from London, on hearing the jingling of the guineas, but my Shakespeare never once, for seven years, emerged from Cimmerian darkness). As you all know, such is Shakespeare's proficiency in all the vocations of life that there is not a calling, trade, or profession that has not claimed him as a fellow. Consequently, what a priceless boon to humanity these seven years of obscurity have proved! What a chance is here, in this long passage of time, to account for the acquisition of that universal knowledge which is attributed to him. Accordingly, if we are to believe his editors, commentators, and critics, it was during these seven, silent years, while holding horses betimes, pray observe, at the doors of theatres for his daily bread, that Shakespeare made himself a thorough master of Law and Practice; Medicine (with treatment of the Insane); Veterinary Medicine, Farriery, Music, Military Science, Seamanship, Botany, Horticulture, Archery, Hawking, Fishing, Fencing, Astronomy, Astrology, Ornithology, Hunting, Printing; he was a strolling actor in Germany, traveled in Italy, read every translation of French and of classic authors, and every original then printed, and finished up with reading the whole of English literature from Chaucer to his own time, and as he read he took voluminous notes of every word and phrase so as to pass them off afterward as his own!

It would betoken a strangely superficial reading of Shakespeare's plays not to perceive defects therein. But they are very largely due to youth, inexperience, and to carelessness, and the carelessness was due, I believe, to the pressure of time. His metaphors are sometimes mixed, such as "taking arms against a sea of troubles." There are expressions which are too elliptical, such as "I'll look no more, Lest my brain turn and the deficient sight Topple down headlong"; or "And bid me, when my fate would have me wive, To give it her." And then there are obscure allusions, such as "run-aways eyes," and "a fellow almost damn'd in a fair wife," and "most busy lest, when I do it," and many, many more, which are held very often to be misprints. But I am inclined to set them down quite as often to careless, hasty writing; and of all these defects Shakespeare must have been quite as conscious as we can be. Are we arrogant enough to suppose that we can

see what he could not? But inasmuch as, when heard on the stage, these phrases, even the most obscure, convey some vague kind of fleeting sense, Shakespeare suffered them to pass uncorrected, knowing, moreover, that he was writing solely for the stage and not for the poring eyes of critics and commentators, of whose existence he, with all his imagination, could never have dreamed.

Surprise is often expressed at Shakespeare's apparent indifference to the fate of his plays. As far as we know they were never even printed with his consent. May not possibly an element of this indifference be traced to a consciousness of these very defects in them which have just been mentioned? And must he not have noted many more than we can see? Where we see only strength, may not he have seen traces of weakness? Must he not have had thoughts lying deeper than even he could utter? Are we to suppose that he ever regarded his work as perfect? We cannot imagine it, and it verges on rash frivolity even to think it, but may he not have noted flaws in *Portia*, in *Rosalind*, in *Imogen*? From the starry threshold of *Jove's court*, where we may never win, might he not see, in his day-dreams, a world fresher and fairer than that which he had himself created? Possibly, some such consciousness of an ideal standard, loftier than he had ever attained, may have led, first, to dissatisfaction with his plays, and then to indifference to their fate.

All this, however, is mere surmise. A reason, genuinely valid, is to be found, I think, in Shakespeare's delicate sense of honor. He was the dramatist of his company, the breadwinner, to whom his fellow-actors looked for their livelihood. He wrote his drama, taking as his plot, in order to save time and eliminate as far as possible all chance of failure, either some old play, whereof the dramatic power had been already tested, or some popular novel, or some chapter of history; the drama was paid for by his company; it was henceforth theirs, and he ceased to hold any property in it whatsoever.

In discussing Shakespeare's faults (how it warms the heart to speak of Shakespeare's faults! the patronizing attitude of a critic is so soothing to the literary mind!), in discussing Shakespeare's faults (pardon me for repeating the phrase; 't is so pleasant!), we must bear in mind that *Minerva's* is the only instance on record, as has been said, where panoplied perfection was achieved at a

blow, and she was a goddess. All we mortals, however, must win what we can of perfection by long, weary, and heavy labor, and at the cost of many dismal failures on the way. To this law of labor and of growth Shakespeare was no exception. When he came to London, there were already great luminaries in the dramatic world, whose plays were alike the delight of the Court and of the people. There was Greene, whose mimic kings talked and bore themselves right royally; and Lyly, who stood so close to the very throne that he dared in his dramas to mirror the Queen and her favorites, and whose clowns excelled in coarse and popular conceits and puns; and Marlowe, who, born within the same twelvemonth with Shakespeare, was, when a mere boy of twenty-three, dazzling all London with his impassioned lines, and revealing the flexibility of blank verse; and Kyd, who reflected those cruel times in his powerful dramas; and there were Chapman and Peele, — all these great dramatists were Shakespeare's masters, at whose feet he sat when his dramatic life began. They were hardly paralleled throughout Europe, and if the plots of so many of their tragedies were cruel and deserve to be called by Symonds "The Tragedy of Blood," we must bear in mind that they were really only showing the very form and pressure of their times, when men were accustomed to the sight of blood; when the headsman's axe was seldom idle, and the ground of Tower Hill was with man's blood painted gules, gules. This it was that made men tolerate, and applaud to the echo, *The Spanish Tragedy*. It was under this influence that Shakespeare wrote his earliest tragedy, *Titus Andronicus*, which he may have written in collaboration with another dramatist, or have remodeled, as was his wont in after years, some older play. The latter supposition is, I think, the more likely. The fable is so unspeakably abhorrent that many editors have rejected the whole play as spurious. This is not, I think, a sufficing reason. The plot is directly in the line of popularity, and Shakespeare needed money, and so far from softening the horrors of the old play, I incline to the belief that, wherever he could, Shakespeare deepened them. Why should he not? The worse it is, the better it is. An author named Meres, in 1598, enumerates *Titus Andronicus* among the tragedies which had made Shakespeare famous, and I can readily believe it. For myself, personally, I acknowledge that I read it once most carefully, and found many a passage which

cried aloud, "I am Shakespeare's!" Oxen and wainropes cannot induce me to read it again. Life is too short.

But ah, with what delighted eyes we turn to Shakespeare's earliest comedy, where he shook off the foul damps of Cerberus and blackest Midnight born, and yielded himself in unconfined delight to the jocund sunshine of *Love's Labour's* (whether *Lost* or *Won*, — who cares?) endured by high-born cavaliers for the sake of laughing girls of France. With the lavish prodigality of youth, on every hand he scatters jewels, sparkling with wit and wisdom, and, while untwisting all the chains that tie the hidden soul of harmony, in youthful frolic he dashes nectar full in our faces.

But Shakespeare was, however, always thus lavish. Do you remember those lines which bear with them a perennial charm: "Come sit by my side and let the world slip; we shall ne'er be younger"? How exquisite they are! Breathing love and tenderness, tinged with the faintest shade of sadness over the vanishing fleetness of human life, as sad as *sunt lacrymae rerum*. A prudent poet, one would suppose, thrifty in the disposition of his treasures, would have reserved his choice pearl for some occasion of state, — but not so Shakespeare; he knew that he had, like the good little girl in the Fairy Tale, but to open his month and flowers and jewels would always fall from his lips, so he threw this one away on — a drunken tinker, in *The Taming of the Shrew*.

Of course, as a technical drama, it is plain enough that *Love's Labour's Lost* is far from perfect. But I hope our intercourse with Shakespeare is not restricted to those occasional hours passed in a theatre, where we fleet the time in transient emotions. When, however, in the privacy of our homes our ears drink in the melody of his verse and our souls expand with his wisdom, then dramatic instruction becomes to us impertinent and a trifle light as air.

Kyd's influence on Shakespeare did not persist long, yet he is one of the three whom Ben Jonson calls Shakespeare's peers. It was Lyly, I think, although some of my betters differ from me, who helped Shakespeare most in his early years. In Lyly's solitary comedy he found humor, in which Marlowe appears to have been deficient, and the humor is there put into the mouths of servants, as it is so often in Plautus, where Shakespeare also might have found it, but I think it is more likely that he took it second-hand from Lyly.

But his apprenticeship to any dramatist was of short duration. He very soon became an absolute master of his craft and finally the

"Soule of the Age!
The applause! delight! the wonder of our Stage!"

to quote Ben Jonson's warm-hearted, enthusiastic eulogy of him.

It is impossible to say how much Shakespeare in the perfection of his powers owed to study or to his native genius. It has been remarked that he gave to Enobarbus in *Anthony and Cleopatra*, at times, the office of a Greek Chorus. But there is another tragedy, wherein Shakespeare felt, I think, even more keenly than in *Anthony and Cleopatra* the need of just such aid as a Greek Chorus would supply. What were the origin, the purpose, and the effect of this Chorus, has been, naturally, the subject of profound research. Let us assume that all the results of this research are at our fingers' ends, and that we know by heart every argument advanced by every scholar, with the final conclusion that a Chorus represents spectators, who respond to every emotion inspired by the actors and not only openly express their approval or condemnation, and reveal the irony of the situation, but are the exponents of public opinion.

It is in the awful tragedy of *Lear* that Shakespeare felt, so it seems to me, the need of a Greek Chorus; not the Chorus of Euripides or, later, of the Latin Seneca, but the Chorus of Aeschylus and of Sophocles. For six or seven plays Shakespeare did supply a Chorus, sometimes so naming it, sometimes calling it "Prologue," sometimes "Gower," or "Time," or "Rumor," but, under whatever name, it was not the Greek Chorus. Except in one or two instances where the flight of time or the effect of false rumor, or a change of scene must be explained, Shakespeare's Chorus tells only that which, with more or less ingenuity, he might have unfolded in the play itself. This is, however, far, very far from fulfilling the purpose of the Greek Chorus; and, as I have said, in *Lear* there seems to be a genuine need of it. Mark Shakespeare's device, as I think, for supplying this need. Recall that Cordelia is banished in the first Act and must not reappear before the close of the tragedy; yet not only must she not be forgotten by us, but we must be made constantly aware of her unseen presence and of Lear's folly in banishing her. Once or twice an allusion

to her is wrung from her distracted father, but no courtier, no nobleman after Kent's peremptory banishment, dares even breathe the name of the lost Cordelia. In such a dramatic perplexity, a Greek Chorus would fulfil its purpose by recalling to the old King his past folly, and thereby keep Cordelia's memory ever present to us. How can this purpose be achieved on an English stage? By a stroke of his own genius, as I think, Shakespeare gave the office of a Greek Chorus to the all-licensed Fool, who, by virtue of his privileged position, could speak to the King with an unbridled tongue. Shakespeare prepares us for him as a champion of Cordelia, by telling us that since she is gone to France, the Fool "has much pined away." His first words to the old King are in undisguised ridicule of the folly of giving away his kingdom. Read the play and mark how continually the Fool's speeches refer either outright to Lear's folly or lead up to it, and once he ventures so far as to refer to Cordelia almost by name. "What does Shakespeare mean," Edwin Booth once asked me, "by making the Fool keep 'rubbing it in' to poor old Lear?" I think an answer is to be found in what I have just said. The Fool never ceases to hope that he can drive Lear to reassert himself, recall Cordelia, and resume his throne until he sees that his Master is hopelessly and helplessly crazed, and then Shakespeare withdraws him; the need of a Chorus is at an end. Let me say, in passing, that I think those actors err who present the Fool on the stage as a young boy. To me, he is a man, one of the shrewdest, tenderest of men, whom long life has made wise, and whom sorrow has made tender; his wisdom is far too deep for a boy, and to be found only in a man, removed by not more than a score of years from Lear's own age. When in his dying minutes, Lear says, "And my poor fool is hanged," I fervently wish that I could believe that, as his storm-tossed soul was gently subsiding into calm, his thoughts revert to the loyal, loving heart of his Jester, — I think that even in that supreme hour I could spare a moment from Cordelia. Alas, no; most reluctantly I am forced to regard these words of endearment as referring to the murdered daughter lying dead across his breast. I do not know in the dramatists of those days a parallel to the Fool in *Lear*. Fools there are, such as Slipper in *James the Fourth*, and in others, but they are the ordinary, coarse, domestic Fool. It is not impossible that the Fool, Feste, in *Twelfth Night*, —

quite the most delightful character in the play to me, — is the prototype of the Fool in *Lear*. He too, measurably enacts a Greek Chorus: — he sees through the shallowness of Olivia's mourning for her brother, he detects Maria's love for Sir Toby, and he tells the fickle Duke Orsino that he is like changeable taffeta.

Let me here make a digression, for a moment, to another land, and another dramatic literature. The French, as you know, adopted in their drama the three unities of Time, Place, and Action, but failed to adopt the Chorus. Now it is the Chorus alone which makes the unities of time and place necessary. The Chorus is composed of men or women, and inasmuch as they have to watch the whole play and even take part in it, their presence is limited by their power of endurance. Human nature cannot, while watching any proceeding, hold out, at the extremest limit, longer than from sunrise to sunset. Hence, for the Chorus's sake, there must be unity of time. For the same reason there must be unity of place; these same old men or maidens composing the Chorus cannot in the twinkling of an eye go from Thebes to Argos. The omission of the Chorus, while retaining the unities of time and place, was, therefore, in the French drama, an oversight into which it fell from following Seneca, whose Choruses were not those of the Greek tragedians, yet the need was felt of a Chorus that could criticise or applaud the action. Hence arose the well-known *claque*. This assertion, let me hasten to add, is pure surmise on my part. There may be abundant literature on the subject, but I have failed to find it, and I may be quite wrong. I can plead in support of it only my own humble experience when, over half a century ago, I saw Rachel in *Phèdre* and attended performances at the Théâtre Français, and then, for the first time, heard the *claque*. I cannot forget the emotion of grateful enlightenment which was evoked by having the finest passages thus distinguished and emphasized for me. I was not at first aware that the applause came from professional *claqueurs*, and was struck with admiration at the quick and sympathetic response of a French audience, and no longer wondered at their reputation for critical insight. Among the earlier editors of Shakespeare, Pope and Warburton were wont to mark, by inverted commas, all the finest passages in the plays. Was not this practice virtually the same as the French *claque*? And when, nowadays, on the printed page

we italicize a passage, are we not effecting with type what the French effect with their hands? Let no fair letter-writer curb herself hereafter in underscoring her words, but take cheer from the reflection that therein she is a disciple, at a long interval it is true, of Aeschylus and Sophocles, and enacts thereby the rôle of a classic Greek Chorus.

When Shakespeare disregarded the three Unities (*Time, Place and Action*), bear stoutly in mind that he did not do it through ignorance. No one knew better than he what they were and how essential they were deemed. He wrote two plays, *The Tempest*, and *The Comedy of Errors*, that are faultless in their observance of them; and another, *The Winter's Tale*, in which they are ruthlessly flouted. In dealing with Time, he employed a device of consummate art, which, in the English drama, is, as far as I know, all his own, and is to be traced more or less clearly in every one, I think, of his plays, except the two I have just mentioned. Let me illustrate this magic art by two noteworthy examples:

Antonio gives his bond for three thousand ducats to be paid at the end of three months to Shylock. With the ducats thus gained, Bassanio starts that evening for Belmont. He arrives there the next morning and proceeds at once to the choice of the caskets. No sooner is the choice over than Solanio brings a letter from Antonio announcing that the three months are at an end, his bond to the Jew is forfeit, and that he must die under the Jew's knife.

Again, in *Othello*, we have the time marked even to the days of the week;—the drama opens at night, and Othello and Desdemona start for Cyprus, and land there on Saturday; that night, in the revelry, Iago plies Cassio with wine and Cassio is disgraced. On Sunday morning he seeks Desdemona and begs her to intercede for him, which Desdemona does. In the evening of that day, Othello receives the Venetian ambassadors, and after the interview, on Sunday night, Desdemona is smothered; within thirty-six hours after her arrival in Cyprus.

When we listen to these plays on the stage, or even when we read them, we are the dupes of Shakespeare's legerdemain. By the interposition of scenes, or of the secondary plot, by allusions to the flight of time, or by chance impressions of its flight, we see days and months glide by in *The Merchant of Venice*; and, in

Othello, by the same means, we watch the gradual growth of jealousy through all the stages of its slow development. Shakespeare hurls his spells into the spongy air, and we are powerless to resist. This to and fro movement of time, which so thoroughly deceives us and is the effect of consummate art, Shakespeare uses even in the historic plays. Thanks to our great Greek scholar, of whom all Harvard is proud, this very device in the treatment of dramatic time has been detected in the opening scene of the *Agamemnon*. Thus we find the two greatest dramatic poets of the world using a kindred art in producing kindred dramatic effects. If we find these effects in their dramas, their hands put them there, and to imagine that we can see them, and that the mighty poets themselves did not, is to usurp a position which I, for one, utterly refuse to occupy; and I say this in clear remembrance that Plato in his *Apologia of Socrates* asserts that poets do not appreciate to the full what they write.

Will you permit me to say a few words on the study of Shakespeare?

First, keep clearly in mind the purpose of your study. It is for pleasure above all things; the pleasure to be derived from pity and fear in the Tragedies, and from amusement in the Comedies. The study of the human heart, its sympathies, its antipathies, its emotions, you can pursue as unerringly in Shakespeare's pages as you can in real life. Herein, when forming your conclusions, beware of accepting what the characters may say of each other, but take only what the characters say and do themselves;—especially study their soliloquies. You will let neither Ophelia nor the Gravedigger settle for you the question of Hamlet's madness, nor will you let your estimate of Caesar be affected by Cassius's description of Caesar's behavior when ill and said "Give me to drink, Titinius, like a sick girl": nor will you accept Henry the Fourth's opinion of Prince Hal; and, as little, will you suffer your judgement of Cleopatra's devotion to Anthony to be influenced by what the other characters may report of her behavior in general, nor even what you may read in Plutarch. You must at first imagine yourself as seated in the Globe Theatre on the Bankside, with no knowledge whatsoever of the characters or of the plot but what shall be unfolded before you on the stage. Shakespeare will tell you everything needful. Sometimes a rhymed couplet will warn

you of a change of scene. (Let me here remark that I think these rhymed couplets were *possibly* intimations to the orchestra to play a few bars.) Very early in the play Shakespeare will tell you where the scene is laid, the time of the year, if it be necessary, and sometimes, by inference, even the day of the week, and you will neither know the source of the plot, nor care not a doit for it, if you did. Your conception of the characters must be formed, as in real life, by their words and their deeds. And, mark this: you must have sympathy with them all; — ay, to a certain degree, even with Iago, and with Richard the Third; so only will you find the key to their character, so only can you look out upon life through their eyes, and thereby give them a corner of your cloak of charity. There are two characters with whom I must acknowledge I cannot have the smallest shred of sympathy. There are no redeeming traits in Regan and Goneril. The only appeal which I can torture into activity for them is one that speaks to the orderly heart of a housekeeper, who would certainly find it trying, at the least, to have a guest with a large retinue enter at an unexpected hour and announce that he would not “stay a jot for dinner.” It is in soliloquies that characters are laid bare, and motives revealed, which evoke a charitable judgement. Is it without purpose that Shakespeare vouchsafes soliloquies to neither of these two demi-devils? Each utters, once or twice, some lines as an *Aside*, but that is all.

Have words ever fallen from human lips more wise in their charity than Madame de Staël's *Tout comprendre, c'est tout pardonner*? In unveiling to us the innermost thoughts of his characters, as he does in soliloquies, Shakespeare enables us to understand everything, and can we then withhold a pardoning sigh? Shakespeare himself warns us to look below the surface. Prince Hal, when his heart was inwardly breaking on account of his father's sickness, asks Poins, “What would'st thou think of me, if I should weep?” “I would think thee,” replied Poins, “a most princely hypocrite.” “It would be every man's thought,” rejoins the Prince, “and thou art a blessed fellow to think as every man thinks; never a man's thought in the world keeps the road-way better than thine.” Therefore, in estimating a character, avoid the uncritical, humdrum road-way.

I have said you would not care a doit for the source of the plot; I might even add that you would hardly care for scenery and cos-

time. Edwin Booth told me that on one occasion, by the failure of his costumes to arrive in time, he and his company were forced to present the first scenes of *Hamlet* in ordinary everyday clothing. "I was conscious," said Booth, "when I entered with the Danish Court that on the stage there was laughter in the air, and that on the faintest sign of self-consciousness on my part the whole performance would be irretrievably turned into a screaming farce. Consequently, I was even more serious than usual, and I think I never lost myself more completely in the play." His manager, who had watched the performance from the rear of the house, afterwards assured him that he himself had never been more impressed by the acting, and never had he seen an audience more lost in attention.

Secondly, as to annotated editions; in them you will generally find notes of three kinds, namely, textual, archaeological, and aesthetic. As to textual notes. You all know that not a single play of Shakespeare was printed under his supervision. During his lifetime certain money-making booksellers, possibly by means of shorthand during a performance, or possibly by bribing the actors or the prompter, surreptitiously obtained copies of some of the plays which were printed in a quarto form and sold for sixpence. These Quartos, with their texts, are chronic mysteries. It is probable from what we know of the customs of printers, in London, in the 16th century,¹ that much of the composing was done by journeymen compositors at their own homes, and, when made up, the forms were carried to the master printer to be printed upon his press. It is my private belief that these compositors had an assistant in their homes, who read aloud the copy to them. There are in the Folio, when certain plays happened to be printed from a Quarto, variations and misprints which can be explained, I think, in no other possible way.

Seven years after Shakespeare's death, two loving friends and fellow-actors gathered together his MSS. and printed them in one large Folio, which, together with the stolen Quartos, provide the material out of which our modern text has been formed.

In the forming of this text there are two editors who deserve the greenest palms: Louis Theobald and Edward Capell. Theobald was an admirable and widely read classical scholar, who, with a better knowledge of Greek than Pope, had assisted the lat-

¹ See Arber's *Transcript of the Stationers' Registers*, vol. ii, p. 22.

ter in his translation of Homer. His power of unraveling a tangled sophistication of the printers amounted almost to inspiration, and several hundred of his emendations are adopted in our text of to-day. He published a quarto volume of errors of omission or commission in Pope's edition of Shakespeare, and in retaliation the savage little autocrat in literature made him the hero of the first edition of his "Dunciad." Poor fellow! he was a bookseller's hack and was for ever tormented by poverty. Hogarth's picture of "The Distressed Poet" is supposed to be his portrait. Pope's revenge turned against the luckless Theobald all his contemporaries. In recent times, however, his reputation has been steadily and deservedly rising.

The outward circumstances of Capell were the reverse of Theobald's. He was affluent, and assuredly had a most enviable amount of leisure, *videlicet*: he copied every word of Shakespeare's plays ten times; what he gained thereby it is impossible to imagine; it certainly was not a lucid style; no English with which I am acquainted is more gnarled and unwedgeable than his. Dr. Johnson said that had he come to him he would have endowed his purposes with words. And yet when you have penetrated to the meaning of his Notes, you will find sound sense. He was the earliest to make much use of the Quartos, and his punctuation is truly admirable. He greatly, nay mainly, influenced Dyce. Dyce greatly influenced the Cambridge Editors, the Cambridge Editors put forth "The Globe Edition," which has been almost accepted as the final text. Thus after a turbulent history, the text of to-day has nearly settled into a condition of stable equilibrium between the Folio and the Quartos, and, textually, there is hardly a comma to choose between the different editions now published.

Archaeological notes explain allusions to manners, customs, and sports, now obsolete, and to the thousand and one things which go to make up a nation's life, public and private, in town and country, high-born and low-born.

Lastly, we come to aesthetic and critical notes, the chief non-isher in our feast. Textual and archaeological notes find their fruition only in the aid they bring to aesthetic notes, which enable us to comprehend Shakespeare's meaning, always the butt and sea-mark of our utmost sail. And here let me say one word as to the Shakespearean contributions of our German brothers. Beware

of mistaking a microscopic examination of Shakespeare's text and grammar, or elaborate archaeological burrowings for an enlightened comprehension of him. I am inclined almost to assert that no one not born to the inheritance of Shakespeare's tongue can understand him. Alien as well as native skilled workmen may construct the winding stairs leading to the turret, but Shakespeare's countrymen alone can throw wide the magic casement. Earliest and foremost among the interpreters of Shakespeare's meaning stands Coleridge; then follow a brilliant throng: Hazlitt, Campbell, Christopher North, Mrs. Jameson, Mrs. Kemble, Hudson, Swinburne, Lowell, Lady Martin,—inexpressibly valuable are her revelations of certain female characters,—and now at the present day, Professor A. C. Bradley, whose interpretations are to be ranked among the most brilliant and most illuminative, almost recalling the palmy days of Coleridge. These are the books, the Academes, from whence doth spring the true Promethean fire. And there are many, many more.

As to a choice of editions, my advice to you is, taking counsel of age and eyesight, to select the clearest and most legible type, and then find encouragement in Charles Lamb's experience: you remember when he was writing to a friend that he still had his "sight, hearing, taste pretty perfect," he added that he could "read the Lord's Prayer in common type, by the help of a candle, without making many mistakes."

Next, beware of putting Shakespeare too early into the hands of the young. For the purpose of teaching English or Archaeology, use some *corpus vilius*, some cheaper stuff, some lesser light,—Ben Jonson, for instance, if he were not at times so indelibly coarse. It is a dangerous risk, lest, by regarding Shakespeare as a task, an aversion be created which may even extend to future years. Moreover, is Shakespeare, whom, as Mr. Emerson says, no mind can measure, to be given to raw youth, and are Shakespeare's revelations of the deepest truths food for babes?

Lastly, let me entreat, and beseech, and adjure, and implore you not to write an essay on Hamlet. In the catalogue of a library which is very dear to me, there are about four hundred titles of separate editions, essays, commentaries, lectures, and criticisms on this sole tragedy, and I know that this is only the vanguard of the coming years. To modify the words, on another subject, of my ever

dear and revered Master, the late Professor Child, I am convinced that were I told that my closest friend was lying at the point of death, and that his life could be saved by permitting him to divulge his theory of Hamlet, I would instantly say, "Let him die! let him die! let him die!"

Before I close, let me offer to you, here and now, my congratulations on the happy star which rains its Shakespearean influence on this favored region. Within this town of Cambridge there once lived an eminent aesthetic commentator; it is, happily, still the home of one whose careful and friendly edition is most deservedly popular; it is also the home of two editresses (instance unprecedented in Shakespearean annals!) from whose fair and laborious hands an edition is now issuing, admirable in all respects; from within these walls there have been put forth by your own honored Professors a "Life of Shakespeare," and a volume on "The Development of Shakespeare as a Dramatist," both of them learned, thoughtful, and attractive; and lastly, in a town not far from here there is preparing by a ripe and admirably equipped scholar an edition, which, when finished, no student of Shakespeare can afford to overlook. There must be something in this rich, rich soil, thus to bear the spring and foison of Shakespearean lore.

And now, in conclusion, as we have been companioned by Shakespeare throughout, let our very last thoughts, as "the last taste of sweets is sweetest last," be his, and let us in his own words bow down in acknowledgement that

"Not marble, nor the gilded monuments
Of princes, shall outlive [his] powerful rhyme . . .
When wasteful war shall statues overturn,
And broils root out the work of masonry,
Nor Mars his sword, nor war's quick fire shall burn
The living record of [his] memory.
'Gainst death and all-oblivious enmity
Shall [he] pace forth; [his] praise shall still find room
Even in the eyes of all posterity
That wear this world out to the ending doom."

Horace Howard Furness, '54.



